

## **From the hydrosocial to the hydrocitizen: water, place and subjectivity within emergent urban wetlands**

### **Abstract**

This paper argues that the expansion of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives within the English water sector, and in particular the opening up of privately-owned-public-spaces (POPS) in urban settings, have generated spatially fixed forms of human-environment relationships that we have termed 'hydrocitizenships'. Utilising empirical fieldwork undertaken within an emergent wetland POPS, we suggest that these novel modes of citizen agency are primarily enacted through the performativity of volunteering, in multiple civic roles such as landscapers, citizen scientists, stewards and storytelling guides. Members of the local community thus effectively curate new civic subjectivities for themselves in response to the site and its organisation, by producing for themselves new modes of 'hydrocitizenship'. These hybrid, intertwined forms of practice prompt us to ask questions about the extent to which these apparently new forms of environmental citizenship are self-directed; or manipulated. As access, control over, and use of, water resources are a synecdoche of structural power relationships within contemporary neoliberal economies, we can go further to suggest that these blue-green POPS are emblematic of a new iteration of hydro-social relations in which water, place and subjectivity become the collateral through which new POPS are secured. For water companies seeking to deploy CSR there is, then, a subtle two step move to be made, by building brand loyalty and then developing new forms of resource management in which local communities accept heightened levels of responsibility for sites to which they are offered recreational access. These emergent 'hydrocitizenships' thus encapsulate very specific geo-spatial subjectivities and performativities which lock in access to waterscapes with closely scripted conditionalities regarding activity and behaviour.

**Keywords:** POPS, environmental citizenship, hydrosocial, hydrocitizenships, volunteering, governmentality, urban wetlands

## Highlights

Privately owned public spaces now include wetlands as well as more traditional green/blue spaces;

Devolving management to community partners enables water companies to build CSR and eco-kudos whilst passing onerous compliance roles to volunteers;

These green/blue wetland POPs arguably reflect a new iteration of hydrosocial relations in which the local community is responsible for the appropriate use of the sites;

Nevertheless, these new green/blue urban landscapes do provide spaces in which local people have the potential to address social and environmental challenges.

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that public access to green spaces in cities enhances people's quality of life (Wolch et al., 2014; Schild, 2018). Indeed, for Németh (2009: p. 2463), such spaces '... are sites of social interaction and active citizenship.' Yet, it is equally recognised that, in most large cities, access is far from equitable, with the most well-regarded spaces, such as large parks, often located in wealthier urban areas (Wolch et al., 2014; Huang and Franck, 2018; Rigolon and Németh, 2018). Given widespread restrictions on public finances, one way for city authorities to address these inequities is to encourage other parties – often the private sector - to provide additional spaces that are accessible to the public, either in return for planning advantages elsewhere, or as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. These spaces, known collectively as Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS), bonus spaces or mass private property (Németh, 2009; Zhang, 2017; Huang and Franck, 2018; Rigolon and Németh, 2018) offer the potential to address some aspects of social exclusion, with New York City often cited as a good example of what can be achieved (Kayden, 2000; Németh, 2009). However, there are also cautions that these spaces are not necessarily accessible to all in the way expected of, say, traditional public parks, with many private spaces having strict rules about who can enter, when and for what purposes (Németh, 2009; Zhang, 2017).

While the private provision of public space is not attractive to all city authorities, the case for opening up private space is compelling, particularly in the UK where so much public space was transferred to the private sector, particularly as part of the privatisation of the water industry. The water industry (pre and post privatisation) has generally been cautious about granting public access to its land, usually citing the potential health and safety risks of people coming into contact with operational water sites (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001). However, this ambivalence has recently given way to a more benign attitude to recreational access, certainly as some water companies are seeking to demonstrate their CSR (Yorkshire Water, 2016). In many cases this new approach has been welcomed by city authorities, conservation agencies and community groups since it has the potential to open up ecologically diverse urban spaces, in the process offering a range of recreational activities to which access has previously been restricted (Huang and Franck, 2018). These spaces thus offer new opportunities for local people, including volunteering to help prepare the spaces for public access and to manage the subsequent use of the spaces.

Through a study of two emergent urban wetland POPS in London, England, this paper seeks to review this new approach to the provision and management of urban open space in the UK. In particular, we ask questions about what CSR can deliver in this context, how this is reflected in the (new) ways in which local people engage with these spaces, and what potential implications this has for our understanding of citizenship. Informed by recent studies (see, in particular Németh, 2009; Perreault, 2014; Huang and Franck, 2018; Rigolon and Németh, 2018), we want to examine the extent to which the provision of public access to privately-owned spaces can offer viable opportunities for the expression of new forms of environmental citizenship that involve participation in the preparation and operation of these spaces.

The context for the paper is the elision of two fields of policy in the UK: first, the reconfigured management and governance of water resources following the privatisation of water supply introduced by the Water Act 1989 and the Water Industry Act 1991 (Ogden and Watson, 1999; Bakker, 2001; Gandy, 2004); and second, the growing pressure on city authorities to innovate in terms of the provision and management of accessible open

spaces, particularly in areas that are currently space-poor (Freyfogle, 2006). The privatisation of the water supply sector has impacted on the ways in which water companies have engaged with their publics; as customers, as stakeholders and, more recently, as community partners (Bakker, 2001; Wateraid, 2018). This developmental process has recognised that water resources management is a complex socio-political governance process that goes beyond technological issues of hydraulic capacity to ask questions about what are termed hydrosocial relations (Linton, 2008; Budds, et al, 2014; Linton and Budds, 2014) that involve the relationships between corporate organisations, governance structures, water and citizenship, and between people and the natural environments where water is stored (Gupta et al., 2013). As part of the Water Industry Act 1991 private water companies have environmental duties towards protected sites and recreational duties that include ensuring water and land is made available for recreational purposes where practicable and in a way that is consistent with their statutory role as a water company, such as to supply water. The creation of wetland POPS, therefore, while being consistent with water companies' statutory obligations to provide opportunities for public recreation and access on their land (Yorkshire Water, 2016), must be examined within the general context where concerns have been raised about the nature of the recreational opportunities being created and the extent to which they represent a pluralist approach to providing opportunities for all citizens to enjoy access to open spaces close to where they live (Freyfogle, 2006). The use of the term 'citizen' rather than 'people' is crucial in these discussions. Open access to natural spaces in the UK has always been viewed as a vital component of citizenship not simply an issue of providing open spaces for the public to use (Parker and Ravenscroft, 2001). Engaging with this policy interface of the management of private water resources and the provision of public open space requires the interrogation of the implications of wetland POPS for citizenship. These POPS result in new ways of engaging with space, through recreation, educational visits and, especially volunteering - when private citizens take on what are essentially state duties with respect to wetland environments (see Anand, 2011, for a discussion of human rights and local governance). One of the key questions to be addressed in this context is at what point does a person compromise and adjust their citizen identity with regard to the governance of their water resources; and what does this mean for our ongoing personal and collective relationships with wetlands and other such environments?

While we focus on two wetland POPS in London, it is important to recognise that similar spatial engagement processes are happening globally, and not just in the UK water sector, as corporate organisations seek to demonstrate their commitment to CSR (Smith, 2003; Marques-Mendes and Santos, 2016). This ‘strategic’ philanthropy (Smith, 2003: 56) of organisations comes in many forms, from commitments to offsetting carbon footprints, to financially supporting socially and environmentally friendly businesses and community activities (Jackson and Rathert, 2016). What connects them is that they are initiatives whose purpose is to persuade the public that there are approaches to business that offer some public benefits. As a result, CSR is now central to water company business models (Lauesen, 2014), and typically involves activities such as community water fairs, outreach campaigns in primary schools, water efficiency engagement through providing free water saving technologies, and a host of sponsorships (Southern Water, 2015).

We argue that this CSR reframing of water spaces by the water companies is characterised by the (slight) modification of the current operational paradigm (that water resources are primarily an economic, rather than public, good) to include sustainability objectives within their business models. We further argue that this has consequences for citizenship, especially amongst individuals who volunteer in – and thus help legitimate – the new POPS. Indeed, building on Dobson’s (2007) concept of environmental citizenship, Vihersalo’s (2017) more recent evocation of climate citizenship and Linton and Budds’ (2014) development of the hydrosocial, we seek to argue that the new wetland POPS offer the potential for a new, related, form of citizenship that has been termed hydrocitizenship (Evans, 2018). For Evans (2018: 203), hydrocitizenship represents a step towards full ecological citizenship in which local people develop ‘... an enhanced awareness of, and sense of responsibility for, water as a vital, *shared* eco-social resource.’ It thus corresponds with contemporary understandings of citizenship as ‘... an approach practiced as people move through their daily lives and activities’ (Tremblay and Harris, 2018: 181), reflecting an active engagement with water governance that is characterised by ‘... learning, negotiation and practice’ (Evans, 2018: 203). As a result, Evans (2018: 203) suggests that hydrocitizens are encouraged to ‘... engage directly with critical issues of global sustainability and

environmental change in local/community settings by envisioning these ‘macro’ issues through the lens of everyday relations and lived experience.’

In developing our arguments, the next section of the paper will explore the specifics of wetland POPS in the UK, how these wetland POPS are situated in wider hydrosocial relations and what this relationship means in terms of new citizen forms. The findings of primary qualitative research are then used, in the following section, to identify three distinct themes relating to the ways in which hydrosocial relations are influenced by wetland POPS and CSR. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings for the new citizen form that we have identified as hydrocitizenship. We conclude by arguing that opening up private spaces for public recreation has the potential to make short-term improvements in citizen engagement and opportunities. However, our findings suggest that these marginal gains should not be confused with the broader and longer term injustices that characterise all schemes in which the public are asked to assume some form of (hydro) citizenship duty towards the owners and controllers of private property. As Anand (2011) notes in the different context of access to information in the global south, providing people with access to services, obligations or ‘rights on paper’ does not necessarily empower them as citizens.

### **Wetland POPS, hydrosocial relations and the implications for site specific practices of citizenship**

In the English context, the Water Act 1989 and the Water Industry Act 1991 privatised the water industry and, in the process, transferred – without compensation - the assets of the formerly publicly-owned Regional Water Authorities to a number of newly created, private sector, water companies. These assets included reservoirs and other wetlands, as well as the lands surrounding them, all of which had been bought and developed with public money raised through national taxation. There was no referendum on the subject; the privatisation of the water sector was not even in the 1983 election manifesto which detailed privatising other key nationalised industries (Conservative Party, 1983). The citizenry who had previously owned these assets, albeit mediated through the state, were not consulted in any democratic medium with regards to the forms of new ownership and had no tangible impact on the outcome of the privatisation process (Bakker, 2001). Overnight these physical

and capital assets were transferred wholesale, with political rhetoric focused on how much the divestment of this underinvested sector would save the public purse (Allen and Pryke, 2013).

At the time of privatisation, many of the publically owned wetland spaces were not available for use by the majority of citizens, on operational and safety grounds (University of Brighton Consortium, 2001). Since privatisation, however, a number of these private wetlands have been opened as POPS, often run by wildlife or other charitable trusts (Yorkshire Water, 2016), in a process which Hodge and Adams (2012: 477) have termed 'institutional blending'. As a result urban wetlands, that often contain water supply reservoirs, have become important as recreational spaces, offering environmental access opportunities for local communities. This is particularly significant as local councils seek to downscale their financial commitments, often by outsourcing the management of public space to charitable trusts (Simmons, 2011). These trusts handle the day to day management and make decisions regarding the overall direction of the space – whether recreational football grounds, canal towpaths or parks. Upkeep for many of these POPS – including those in this study, is often funded through management fees, fundraising activities, at-point donation boxes, car parking fees and membership schemes (Scottish Water, 2010).

This recent expansion of wetland POPS needs to be understood in the context of the changing nature of public space. Houssay-Holzschuch and Thébault (2017) argue that public space can be differentiated as being political, legal and social in structure. Political public space arises wherever people can gather to share ideas and express their citizenship. Legal public space reflects property law and is usually understood as municipally owned. Social public space is often created as a display of civic pride and almost always part of urban and peri-urban fabric. Public squares, public parks, waterfronts and seafront promenades have all largely been 'donated' for public use to support community conviviality, shared experiences and to underpin civic life. Social public space is interstitial, since it reflects the points at which public and private space meet - shop doorways, office plazas, train carriages, motorway service stations. The new wetland POPS both connect and unsettle the

relationships between these three modes of public space: under water authority ownership they were once legal, but not political or social, public spaces; under privatisation they have lost their legal identity but have since gained at least some aspects of social public space. This is consistent with much recent literature that has focused on the retreat of 'legal' public space (Gilchrist and Ravenscroft, 2013). This retreat encompasses the selling of space for new building development through to more subtle forms such as the withdrawal of resources so that some spaces fall into disrepair and become unfavourable or unsafe for public use. Motives for these retreats are multiple, and include cost saving austerity measures, gentrification, removing unwanted presences such as homeless sleepers, and longer term aspirations to redevelop particular environments.

Thus, as legal public space becomes squeezed, and political space constricted, there is a concomitant demand for an increase in social public space (Houssay-Holzschuch and Thébault (2017), which has been addressed at least in part by the new wetland POPS. As the work by Gilchrist and Ravenscroft (2013) in the City of London has illustrated, these new POPS are often subject to multiple restrictions on what can be done in them, and are often policed by private security guards and CCTV cameras. These measures ensure that only authorised behaviours, and users who fit into particular profiles, can access and use these spaces, and often only at specific times. What links the many different types of POPS is the manner in which access differs with respect to public space. In civic public spaces the municipal or local authority determines what constitutes acceptable behaviour and access, and enforces this through bylaw regulation. As such, citizens have the final say in collective standards and approaches. In contrast, individuals accessing POPS spaces suspend their normal civic rights and expectations. Their citizenship is limited within POPS: identity shifts to that of the conditionally welcomed guest, licensee or even consumer, rather than that of shared owner. This change in status is crucial in terms of people's relationship with such sites: where once there was a connection to forms of citizen right, there is now something much more akin to social conditionality or subjectivity – that access to, and use of, the site is governed by expectations about how the site is used, by whom and when.



With respect to water resource assets, this is captured in what Linton and Budds (2014) have termed hydrosocial relations. These relations are based on the significance of water as a resource in social and economic reproduction. As Swyngedouw (2009: 56) states: 'hydraulic environments are socio-physical constructions that are actively and historically produced, both in terms of social content and physical-environmental qualities'. The hydrosocial concept draws attention to water's hybrid status as both a natural resource and a social asset, asserting that the management and use of water is intrinsically connected with the ways in which societies organise themselves (Schmidt, 2014). Water resources are fundamental to continued economic growth and there exists an iterative, bounded, relationship between socio-economic development and water security. Understanding how tropes of hydrosocial relationships remake themselves reveals the power dynamics which shape the control of capital (Gandy, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2015).

As Staeheli and Mitchell's (2007: 111) work on property and power relationships in public spaces makes clear, wetland POPS embody hydrosocial relations, in posing questions about both the political intention and the practices of legitimisation that are situated within these sites. They argue that such public spaces shape 'democratic possibilities' by framing personal, communal and civic identities. This means that wetland POPS have the potential to reshape not only citizen relationships with water spaces, but also with each other as well.

Concepts of citizenship, certainly in the UK and across Europe, have become increasingly fluid over the last few decades. In contrast to Marshall's (1950) political classification and Whitehead's (2002) 'clientalist' model, contemporary social and economic policy has increasingly relied on forms of 'active citizenship' in which people have 'performed' duties in support of their communities that might previously have been undertaken by the state, on their behalf (Ravenscroft, 1993; Ravenscroft 1996). To some extent, the idea of active citizenship is not inconsistent with Marshall's (1950) construct of social rights, certainly to the extent that these rights are necessarily bounded by resource constraints in ways that political rights are not. This has been very much the thinking behind Seyfang's (2006) and Dobson's (2007) extensions of citizenship framing to include those who voluntarily take steps towards what they respectively term ecological and environmental citizenships. For Dobson (2007), the practice of environmental citizenship is essentially a voluntaristic act performed by those who believe that they can make a difference even within established

and often hostile political and economic structures. So it is with the more recent development of the hydrocitizenship concept, in which ideas of societal transformation are allied to the voluntary actions of individuals and communities engaged with the regulation, management and use of water (Evans, 2018; Tremblay and Harris, 2018).

The gesture of the active (hydro) citizen has become emblematic of the acceleration of citizen 'responsibilisation' (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Staeheli, 2011), particularly with respect to the management of public spaces such as wetland POPS. In these spaces, private owners have been able to use the rhetoric of citizen responsibility to retain control of their assets while devolving risk, action and an 'ethics of care' to individuals and communities through the empowerment rhetoric of 'localism' (Davoudi and Mandanipour, 2015). In the global south Anand (2011) has noted how laws to promote rights are only effective if they result in the development of institutions and the participation of citizens in governance. Emergent scholarship is exploring the rising number of global environmental-social movements contesting austerity era neoliberal policies which further distort nature-society relationships (Apostolopoulou and Cortes-Vazquez, 2019, Gearey 2019). Yet very little is yet known about the exchanges in the United Kingdom that take place, practically or politically, between private owners and the active (hydro)citizens who take on the obligation of seeking to make wetland POPS a suitable resource for wider public access and enjoyment. Using a case study of two contemporary wetland POPS in London, UK, the next section of the paper will seek to address this gap in knowledge and extend our understanding of the implications for citizenship of the growth of POPS.

### **The example of wetland POPS in London, UK**

The case study sites discussed in this paper, Woodberry Down and Walthamstow Wetlands, are located in densely populated areas in the River Lee (Lea) Valley in North East London, UK.-Woodberry Wetlands (17 hectares in size) opened to public access in May 2016; Walthamstow Wetlands (211 hectares in size) followed in late Spring 2017, again with full public access. The latter is now one of the largest urban POPS in the UK. The two sites are just over two miles apart, with the expectation that a 'greenway' between the two sites will be developed, increasing the connectivity between the communities of Waltham Forest and

north Hackney. Both sites are operational freshwater reservoirs which provide potable water for London. Originally constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both sites were designed solely for drinking water storage. Whilst Woodberry reservoir was closed to public access from its inception, Walthamstow reservoirs (ten in all) have had continual, though limited, public access, conditional via fishing or birdwatching permits. These permits have been unpublicised and so access had been an 'open secret' amongst its recreational users. Woodberry Wetlands meanwhile has had very limited recreational use, with major water engineering on-site leaving little fauna or flora growing, and no other significant wildlife resident. A long-running campaign by local residents has protected the Woodberry Wetlands, with a range of stakeholders subsequently overseeing the transformation of the site to an open wildlife reserve.

The sites are free to access and are promoted as nature reserves which limits the types of activity permitted on-site. The official explanation for the shift from privacy to access has focussed on the benefits of opening up the sites as a public resource in support of community building, experiencing nature, wellbeing and voluntary participation. Prominence is also given to the collaboration between key stakeholders including the London Wildlife Trust and the local authorities. This public relations campaign has steered media attention away from issues associated with public safety, profit, management and reputational risk and towards the community collaboration elements of the endeavour (Waltham Forest Echo, 2017).

The monetary investment needed to enable the transformation of these sites from closed to open access was significant, with an inclusive stakeholder forum needed to apply for funding. Through the creation of the 'Walthamstow Wetlands Partnership' lead by Waltham Forest Council, who themselves donated over £1 million, and supported by the London Wildlife Trust to lead the stakeholder bid, the consortium was able to secure Heritage Lottery Funding of £4.47 million in 2015. Thames Water provided an additional £1.84 million and the Greater London Authority donated £750,000 (Thames Water, 2017). Of a total of just over £8 million in funds, more than three quarters was sourced from public monies for a

site which, although it will be managed by London Wildlife Trust, is still owned by Thames Water.

In addition to the investment of public funding to its private capital asset development, it is also apparent that Thames Water has been able to use the publicity to demonstrate its commitment to the local community ahead of the first wave of domestic competition in the water supply sector. The Water Act 2014 stipulated that by 2017 non-domestic water users will be free to select their water supplier, with competition in the domestic market being phased in over the current parliamentary term up until 2021 (Priestley and Hough, 2016). Whilst this new era of competition does not yet affect domestic users, large scale users, mainly industrial and commercial, can select which water company they 'buy' their water from. Thus it may not be coincidental that the opening up of the wetlands has occurred at this time, as Thames Water will have been seeking to engender brand loyalty through its association with a major new recreational asset for this part of London. This is particularly crucial as the water companies use household revenue streams from domestic water supply contracts to provide debt and equity finance to support expansion of other elements of their global business portfolios (Allen and Pryke, 2013).

A key component in opening these sites has been the use of local volunteers to act as guides to members of the public, to help enforce the bylaws that underpin the POPs and to act as the first point of contact when visitors experience the site. These volunteers are emblematic of what we have termed hydrocitizens: members of the public, and of the local community, who, similar to environmental citizens (Dobson, 2007), perform acts of voluntaristic citizenship in support of the wetlands becoming accessible to all members of the public. There is a tension regarding risk management on site and the expectations placed upon volunteers. The risk of the bylaws being contravened is likely to be mitigated by these volunteers as they manage the expectations of the site managers and the employed personnel from London Wildlife Trust, along with the expectations of the visiting public who may not have had the time to fully assimilate or understand the conditionality within which they may use and access these sites.

During November 2015 and March 2016, before the sites were opened to the public, thirty in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured qualitative interviews were undertaken with a wide range of partnership and community stakeholders (including formal private, public and Environmental NGO project partners, local residents, site volunteers, local birders and anglers, local councillors and local government representatives). The interviews explored the different processes through which stakeholders were involved in the sites, the varied partner and volunteer objectives, and the social and environmental significance of these sites being brought into wider public access. In addition, these data are augmented by researcher participant observation at on-site volunteering days, plus local and national media coverage in print and social media concerning the opening of these sites. The respondents interviewed were a representative sample of the cohort of stakeholders involved in the wetlands sites; though not representative of the socio-demographic make-up of the surrounding locale. This alerts us to the non-representative aspects of environmentally focused volunteering with age, class and race leading factors regarding both who volunteers within communities and why (see Musick and Wilson, 2010; Rochester et al., 2010 and Pearce, 1993) with a clear bias towards those who are white and more likely to have participated in further and higher education. The findings are drawn from a thematic analysis of the data using computer aided and manual coding which identified codes and sub-codes which are the bases for the three themes discussed in the next section.

### **Identifying specific practices of hydrocitizenship**

This paper aims to examine how CSR affects the management of urban open space and in particular how this impacts on people's interactions with these spaces and their personal subjectivities and experiences of citizenship. Three interconnected themes emerged from the participant interviews, each revealing the importance of these wetland sites for citizenship as they affect personal and civic identity formation, and the close relationship between the two. The first thematic consideration addresses the hybrid governance structure on these POPS sites. This goes beyond the boundary between ownership and management of the sites to include the ways in which volunteers take on hybrid positions as both site users and enactors of governance stratagems. The second theme explores this further to question how the specific qualities of an urban wetlands site generates or

supports multiple actor identities specifically responding to the qualities inherent to these blue/green spaces and the implications for CSR initiatives. In particular, this second theme considers how performances of hydrocitizenship in the form of personal subjectivities and civic identity are affected by the characteristics of these natural spaces. This links with the final theme, which is about the human health and wellbeing generated in these sites, and how the experiential benefits of volunteering in blue/green spaces may help to inform our understanding of the connectivity between hydrocitizenship (Evans, 2018) with hydrosocial practices (Tremblay and Harris, 2018).

***Theme one: the growing prominence of hybrid environmental partnerships as governance mechanisms***

Both wetland sites are managed by London Wildlife Trust (LWT) with a small team of paid staff, assisted by a large number of unpaid volunteers. Support in opening these sites has been drawn from a range of other environmental NGOs, local community groups and local councils, as well as Thames Water. The interviews reveal that the dynamic between these governance clusters is complex. Although there is a shared vision to open the sites as wetland reserves, motivations differ. For some the motivation is concerned with land rights and access:

“Politically, also, it’s quite motivating for me to make publically accessibly free a privatised piece of land, particularly (one belonging to) a water utility”.

(Environmental NGO representative)

For others the rationale is soundly pivoted on environmental and community concerns to enable:

“... the right thing for our environment, for our communities that we work within”.

(Local community volunteer)

Another accepts the compromises of working alongside Thames Water:

“What’s the alternative is what I always say, put it in perspective....The alternatives are it’s privately owned and never opened....”

(Environmental NGO representative)

The Water Industry Act 1991’s Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation (CAR) (Defra, 1995) is instructive. This document stipulates that where public freedom of access is established it must remain so. Hence Walthamstow Reservoirs became integral to Thames Water’s ‘community’ recreational assets whilst Woodberry’s closed access status meant that it has never been advertised on Thames Waters’ website. Supported by a growing localism agenda promoted by a Conservative government since 2009 (Cameron, 2009), citizens now are encouraged to engage with the governance of their immediate surroundings. From a local council perspective this desire to empower citizens is in tandem with a macro-economic political austerity context in which public spending cuts reduce municipal resources. Environmental partnerships with corporate organisations, housing developers and environmental NGOs is a logical cost-cutting approach to managing different forms of public space with tangible ‘feel good’ outcomes for their constituencies. Whilst for the private sector actors, in this case Thames Water, POPS initiatives enable positive branding through corporate social responsibility endeavours:

“We get a lot of messages across by opening up to the public, and we don’t want to miss out on that opportunity. So we’ve worked quite hard on that, that’s one of the things we want to keep... (the) Thames Water brand will be around, and scattered around the site. At the end of the day the council are going to up and leave, and we don’t want it to just to be seen as a London Wildlife Trust Site”

(Thames Water representative)

Alongside these often contentious environmental partnerships sits the role of the unpaid volunteers. Management of these sites is dependent on the contributions of these volunteers. Both sites are expected to be self-financing through charging for events and

generating income through onsite amenities such as cafes and car parks. This leaves some of the risk management of governing the visiting public to unpaid volunteers who are involved in a range of duties including hard landscaping (reed clearing and tree pruning), leading members of the public in guided walks and storytelling events, and stewarding tours of the restored wetland heritage buildings. This leads to another governance mechanism as volunteers bear elevated levels of risk and responsibility for the general public on sites which can be construed as dangerous, given the safety risks associated with large deep water reservoirs particularly in Walthamstow Wetlands. Aspects of managing access to watery landscapes in urban environments must be borne by the end users either through voluntary labour, or through agreeing to curtail certain behaviours: no cycling, no dog walking, no alcohol, no barbeques, no congregating and access only during daylight hours. As an LWT representative remarks regarding the prospective policing of the site:

“...you will have your set of rules and it depends who we’ve got on-site; how many people are on-site and what powers are put in the hands of the volunteers who will be here.”

(Environmental NGO representative)

In this way, risk and performativity shifts from site owner to site user, particularly as volunteer rangers are also themselves consumers of these spaces. As the same interviewee goes on to discuss, identifying how people’s individual use of this space will be curbed is ambiguous:

“You have to start as you mean to go on and if you’ve got a set of rules you need to try and make people play by those rules.”

There is a clear tension here between the idea of the wetland sites as civic leisure space, to enable rest relaxation and ‘play’, and the shifting emphasis on ‘play’ as the means by which behaviour is influenced, coerced even, to limit what is defined as acceptable within this



POPs locale – which is redolent of Massey’s (2004) work on geographies of responsibility, within which identities shift as new situations and responsibilities arise. The next two sections examine in detail how the governance of these wetland POPS has influenced identity formation and citizenship.

***Theme two: the curation of subjectivities –individual, organisational, community and the wetlands themselves***

“I feel like it reminds me of the Lake District there. The islands there. And that’s a personal thing from my childhood, but a lot of people will feel the same, that it connects them.”

(Local resident and volunteer)

The second theme relates to the curation of subjectivities. It is well established that enabling urban citizens to enjoy nature, even if highly landscaped, has positive impacts both on wellbeing and on valuing our natural environments. Indeed, a long tradition exists of the co-creation of human subjectivities and identity within landscapes (Ingold, 1993; Tuan, 1977; Wilson, 1984) and particularly within waterscapes (Strang, 2004; Gandy, 2014). For many of the respondents their subjectivities were increasingly linked with the study sites where they experienced changes in their sense of self. As the wetlands were emerging into the public eye, so too were volunteers and other local stakeholders involved in the sites’ development. These subjectivities were hybrid and interconnected. This is certainly the case for the anglers and birdwatchers who have historically been granted the only public access permits on the Walthamstow site. They portray their recreational, personal stewardship role and ‘inner’ lives as linking intimately:

“... we love the freedom of the site....It’s in our hearts to look after this place”.

(Angler)

Volunteering on the sites also provides the opportunity for people to change their sense of self. Some volunteers connect closely with nature: walking, clearing pathways and digging in reed beds, or photographing the urban reserve process. One interviewee explained this in terms of using the space for both mental wellbeing and self-determination:

“...getting out of the house and going to Woodberry Wetlands has been my absolute mental health and wellbeing. It has transformed my life. ...that sense of belonging and the ability to escape is immeasurable.”

(Local volunteer)

Others see volunteering as fundamental to their sense of self as someone who gives back to their community, which has an intragenerational aspect. Some are looking to make new friends and recreate themselves as conservationists. There are those who see volunteering as a useful addition to their CV, possibly for future jobs within or outside of environmental conservation. For others the volunteering is escapism; from jobs, from family, from small spaces, from urban noise and the distractions of modern life. The sites offer an alternative reality where changing sense of self and subjectivities linked to related citizenships are created in ways that are connected to specific aspects of these wetland spaces.

This ‘curated’ nature of subjectivity is shaped by the behavioural limitations linked to the new forms of governance for these wetland sites described in theme one. As with the physical attributes of the reserves, these volunteer subjectivities are shaped by behaviour and by awareness and access. The specific arrangements for access to these wetland areas is conditioned by their on-going role in water supply and the health and safety issues that arise which imposes greater restrictions, in terms of use and prohibited behaviours, than local public parks and other open spaces where water management is usually not an issue. Volunteers expressed their concern that the different local publics using the sites for the first time may not be aware of the differences that arise in wetland and water management sites compared to other public spaces:

“They’ve got this impending hundreds of thousands of people per year, or over a hundred thousand visitors a year and there’s a sense that the site is going to change for ever or that it might be ruined”.

(Local volunteer)

Implicit in this view is that there are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ types of user; considerate or inconsiderate citizens. The volunteers adopt the mantle of benign site governors, whilst themselves also being future end-users when accessing the site but not participating in a voluntary activity. Yet they are not passive recipients but are co-constructors in responding to the water company’s CSR agenda. In return for wetland site access those involved in opening the POPS wetland sites accept the limitations, or the artifice, of the opening up of these wildlife reserves. A local councillor went on to suggest that Thames Water’s involvement in the wetlands was part of a broader campaign to connect with Londoners:

“.....they have such a massive programme of ongoing works across London, it will be helpful for them to be able to point to something that they are giving back. I’m sure there is some reputational advantage to be had when you spend a lot of your time digging up London roads.”

(Local town councillor)

Many of the volunteers in this early stage of the site preparation were notably white, and often older, so not representative of the social-demographics of the surrounding community, which is very diverse in terms of ethnicity. The younger volunteers on-site were mostly from outside the local area, with a further education or university background, looking to gain practical environmental work experience. This absence of mixed-age, mixed-ethnicity volunteers, in a locale noted for its higher levels of economic deprivation, together with incoming ‘middle class’ volunteers from outside the borough, indicates that tensions may arise regarding who the sites are ‘for’ and the ‘correct’ ways in which the spaces can be used and enjoyed.

For long term site users opening up the space threatens their own site-constructed subjectivities. This is in part shaped by the fact that until recently the water management priorities of the wetlands meant it was closed off to most members of the public except for certain groups of bird watchers and anglers who benefitted from permissive access at certain times and to particular parts of the site. As one birdwatcher revealed, the opening up of the site was not welcomed by long standing site users. Talking about informal group discussions with birders he revealed:

“So they feel an ownership over the site and they’ve always known it as Walthamstow Reservoirs. ...he said it would be like Barnes where they’ll be turning it into a theme park for birders and the real birders will suffer as a result of the majority of people coming in.”

(Birder)

And yet, although a birder himself, his own interaction with the site was viewed from a different perspective:

“I get pleasure from the social interaction with the other volunteers and the visitors to the site on the monthly tours. Talking to people about something that I’m enthusiastic about and then them responding to me really positively makes me feel good and gives me good social interaction.”

This is instructive about how hydrosocial relations and hydrocitizenships develop through engagement with POPs specifically and wetland spaces in general. To some degree the volunteer experiences and behaviours confirm Evans’s (2018) view that hydrocitizenship involves engaging with broad issues of sustainability and developing a sense of self and subjectivity that is shaped by the emotional connection to water (Tremblay and Harris, 2018). But this is only a partial picture as the volunteers are also self-constructing themselves as emerging hydrocitizens through a set of pragmatic and often conflicting

experiences and relationships between duties as a volunteer, the materialities of the wetland sites and the institutional context created by the private water companies. The volunteer quoted above was both a member of a bird watching community that was dismissive of the POPS opening, yet for himself this transition afforded him an opportunity to enhance his sense of self and subjectivity through perceived health benefits, companionship and an outlet for his birding photographs on the wetlands' website. For the respondents interviewed, freedom, nature, conviviality, all dynamically engage with one another but within the constraints of the management of the sites to create distinctive hybrid curated citizenships which are place-time specific, all orientated around these very specific urban waterscapes and are often developed through volunteering. This leads us, finally, to our third core theme about how identity and citizenship are linked to wellbeing experiences that include volunteering.

### ***Theme three: Identity, (hydro) citizenship and wellbeing***

The empirical fieldwork highlighted the importance of the sites in enabling civic participation in caring for urban blue/green spaces. Benefits for participants included enhanced wellbeing, community connectedness, improved physical activity, social engagement, one-ness with nature, mental replenishment, and a place to explore ones spirituality and 'place in the world'. With an explicit focus on the particular qualities that a tranquil, water imbued, amenity provides within the city, one volunteer stated that:

“Parks are very much for people to blast and belt about...whereas I think the use by the public on the nature reserve will be a much more mental health and wellbeing kind of usage...much more reflective, much more thoughtful.”

(Local volunteer)

The reserves are seen by volunteers and other interviewees as not-parks, but as close to a wildness as it's likely to achieve in inner-city London. The size of Walthamstow Wetlands in particular, attests to the possibility that the types of citizenships forged here will have their own special resonances, giving some people an opportunity of losing themselves to 'nature'

so close to home. This then enables a highly personal interpretation of the value of the space and the importance of a civic based connectedness with other actors within this blue/green space. This is as much the case for the personal identity as the organisational identity of the stakeholders:

“..it’s a really interesting thing because this whole thing about identity is, you know, this site could be everything to anyone, but it does have to hold on to, you know, even I forget ‘Oh yes, it’s a nature reserve’. Actually that’s what makes it exciting for me and its connection to water”.

(Local resident)

We can go further to argue that this active citizenship is forged by the characteristics of the sites themselves. Moreover it is the significance of the ‘blue’, the water, in these wetland sites that creates a special place-specific attachment in the midst of highly dense urban fabric. What emerges are multiple, adaptive hydrocitizenships. Different actors can each derive some slightly different benefits from these settings. Throughout the interviews the qualities of the water in these settings – the sound of lapping water, waving reeds in the breeze, the call of the water birds, the changing light on the water – and the recognition that these sites were the freshwater reservoirs of London, all combined to enable different kinds of civic attachments to these wetlands POPS by those involved in opening up the sites to the public.

These practices of hydrocitizenship are pragmatic, contested and highly contingent upon continual mutual benefits being derived from the blue/green spaces themselves. For volunteers these benefits are a mix of physical wellbeing and a social recognition of their contribution and knowledge within the reserves. Thames Water gains eco-kudos from the community, as nearly all local users are or will be residential customers. Skilful brand management in the face of a nascent end to their water supply monopoly, together with satisfying regulated codes of conduct regarding public access to their water assets, strengthens Thames Water’s sustainable corporate identity. The councils and other local level governance agencies benefit from a strategic passing on of risk, resources and costs to the Environmental NGOs involved in managing both sites, whilst forming closer relationships

with national property developers such as Berkley Homes who want to construct waterside housing.

When combined it is clear that the three themes call our attention to how emergent forms of hydrocitizenship can be constructed and performed within particular environmental landscapes, drawn from historical socio-economic contexts. For this particular part of London the reservoirs serve to forge specific practices of hydrocitizenship linked closely with place-identity, hallmarked by increasing access to blue/green spaces in highly urbanised environments. This was explained by a local councillor closely involved in the wetlands site:

“I hope that having a green space, having that accessibility, will encourage some of our young people to think on a bigger scale. To feel like they can go and disappear with a book, or with a friend, and they can go and have a little bit of freedom in that open space which I think is profoundly important.”

(Local councillor)

### **Discussion: Emergent (hydro)citizenships**

A crucial focus within citizenship literature (Marshall, 1950; Dobson, 2007; Anand, 2011) is to ask what rights, duties, practices and identities are forged through engagements between the self, those who govern, and the techniques of governance that we experience. For our purposes the focus is to ask what aspects of citizenship theory are relevant to an understanding of hydrosocial relations and dynamics using a hydrocitizen perspective. This has involved revealing how people develop hydrocitizenship not just by connecting local engagements with water to global environmental concerns (Evans, 2018) but also by developing a sense of self, subjectivity and identity that interact through a material and emotional connection to wetland spaces that is shaped by the practices that need to be undertaken to negotiate the specific governance and management practices at work in any location. In particular our enquiry is to explore how this changing water governance CSR landscape provides insights into new or remodelled forms of citizenship, particularly with regards to accessing much needed urban ‘wild’ spaces. As one local resident, who lives within the site, describes her response to this resource within a highly urbanised locale:

“There’s a lapping sound, and a wave sound and it’s just the water breaking against the side of the reservoir. But actually it feels like the movement of the water, I guess, that it’s a living thing and it’s inhabited by other living things.”

(Local volunteer)

Our sense of self, our governance landscape and our consequent civic endeavours, are closely tied to where we live and how we are enabled to live. Post-Marshallian concepts of citizenship, in all its attendant forms (see Dean, 2014), articulate how citizenship concerns with rights, duties and responsibilities can, do and must operate across territorial boundaries, as the nation state becomes less relevant in response to globalised, politicised and technologically shaped identities. We all exhibit multiple, hybrid, non-binary environmental citizenships that operate in both public and private spheres of life (Dobson, 2007). It could be argued then that multiple forms of citizenship exist such as Seyfang’s (2006) ecological citizenship and Vihersalo’s (2017) climate citizenship. Indeed, we can be citizens within different jurisdictions, and hold multiple citizenships (informed by multiple constructions of citizenship) at any one time. It is thus argued within post-citizenship debates that ‘sociations’ (social networks) and communities of interest become the new locus of citizenships rather than formal national state boundaries (see Hayward, 2006; Dobson, 2007, for a discussion of trans-boundary eco-citizenship), while social networks and non-representative governance forums rather than formal political and legal structures become the routes to lobbying for rights claims (Parker and Ravenscroft, 2001).

Our concern in this paper is to understand and express how forms of sense of self, subjectivity, identity and citizenship are constructed through connections with the stewardship of POPs – and wetland POPs in particular. And, as our respondents have made clear, being an active hydrocitizen is not always comfortable or consensual. When we apply this hybridity to individual and community relationships to specific spaces we can begin to unpick what it may mean to be a hydrocitizen, as expressed by this participant:



“There are too many people who have got their own interests and not doing what they should do, you know? And these are the people you have to fight against and it isn’t an easy task lots of the time.”

(Local volunteer)

As we argued at the start of the paper, those of us living in the global North increasingly rely on forms of ‘active citizenship’ to fill the vacuum left by the (local and national) state. While much of this activity, certainly according to Seyfang (2006), Dobson (2007) and Vihersalo (2017), can be conducted in isolation from the rest of society, our evocation of hydrocitizenship cannot. Rather, it is framed by individual practices undertaken within a communal context, often located in environments that are neither wholly public nor private. Our hydrocitizens are thus at the forefront of social and political transformation, at once enabling the public use of private land while simultaneously undermining any broader claim that the exercise of citizen rights belongs in spaces that are politically and legally, as well as socially, public.

Furthermore, our hydrocitizens are also implicated in the practices by which commercial organisations reposition themselves within local markets through focusing on their ‘green’ credentials and the establishment of POPS – what better evidence could there be of public benefit than volunteers making private lands available to the public? This corporate manoeuvring enables these organisations to reposition their profit making activities into a ‘post-political’ frame by using environmental concerns – and active citizens - as a means to project an ethos of being ‘all in it together’. It is at this juncture that we can begin to see how nuanced, contested forms of environmental citizenship begin to emerge (Hayward, 2006). There is a tension between organisations building their green credentials through CSR activities and people undertaking what they feel are personally beneficial environmental activities, especially volunteering, unaware of possible other, or ulterior, motives. During this process, agency is reappropriated through collusion, as water, place, practice, sense of self, and identity are all collateralised to create parameters of what we understand as hydrocitizenships that are tightly defined by governance and the management of space.

## **Conclusions: the emergence of hydrocitizenships within the hydrosocial**

In concluding, therefore, we have suggested in this paper that the emergent hydrocitizenships found in our case study sites encapsulate the very specific geo-spatial performativities which are permitted in these POPS waterscapes, with closely scripted conditionalities regarding activity and behaviour. It is argued then that these emergent hydrocitizens consequently embody a new form of citizenship in which rights, duties and obligations are in flux, mediated through practice and experiential learning, especially for volunteers, yet tightly bounded in space and time. We argue these plural hydrocitizenships are a product of a very particular epoch of the hydrosocial cycle, one in which specific types of risk bearing is passed from corporate entities and governance organisations to citizens under the guise of corporate social responsibility. We can thus see that urban wetlands such as Walthamstow and Woodberry can be reconceived as hydrosocial territories (Boelens et al., 2016), building on Houssay-Holzschuch and Thébault's (2017) presentation of 'social' public space. The geographical boundaries of the sites are overlain with social boundaries linked to governance and management that define the range of prescriptive actions and behaviours allowed, both of the volunteers and of the wider publics. Yet this is an immanent process: as the volunteers develop practices that mean they are often members of the public, using the site in a non-voluntary capacity as a consumer but also at other times when volunteering they are hybrid consumer-manager-citizens. These urban wetlands thus reflect back to us the asymmetrical power dynamics associated with hydrosocial relations. As Boelens et al (2016: 2) outline, hydrosocial territories have:

'... contested functions, values and meanings, as they define processes of inclusion and exclusion, development and marginalization, and the distribution of benefits and burdens that affect different groups of people in distinct ways'.

We can go further. The self-determined, though sculpted and curated, actions of these volunteers and other recreationalists who use these sites can be seen as forms of

hydrocitizenship that involve reclaiming agency. However, this agency is shaped by the limitations of CSR and site specific water governance and management regimes. Furthermore, hydrocitizenships 'sit' within hydrosocial relations and, using POPS as a real world example, we see that despite the opportunity that these wetlands provide for local residents there is no real redress in the power imbalances regarding POPS as assets that once belonged to the public realm. At present, the volunteers and others who work, recreate and oversee, or 'police,' the sites are in the main white middle class and eco-conscious. Their expectations around appropriate behaviours within the sites may not reflect those of the community of likely users, but may align more with the local governance bodies and asset owner who enable their volunteer activities. Access comes with conditionalities and this in turn shapes the type of possible hydrocitizenships that can form. The actors within our case study, therefore, become the 'tentacles' of the governance and ownership model, using their free voluntary contributions of time and labour to maintain and protect the waterscape.

In many ways then these hydrocitizenships reflect an epoch of the hydrosocial – one which reflects a neo-liberal "hydraulic environment" (Swyndegouw 2009: p56) within which power asymmetries are deflected, subverted and redirected away from direct recognition (Gandy 2004 and Schmidt 2014). Linton and Budds (2014) suggest that the hydrosocial relationship is cyclical and dialectical, in a continual process of remaking and reshaping, to explain evolving modes of water use, management and political visibility. The means by which water is represented also has 'political effects' (Linton and Budds, 2014: 180) as well as a relational, socio-political resonance. Appreciating this transactional aspect of water assets - that they function as collateral capital goods within increasingly marketised environments - enables an approach which asks what impact POPS have on our communal relationship with water resources. Wetland POPS could be argued to run counter to the arguments around the retreat of public space as they open up access to new nature reserves. But this public space is conditional, limited and constructed to appear inclusive whilst being highly prescriptive, as is the case of POPS in USA case studies (Németh, 2009; Huang and Franck, 2018; Rigolon and Németh, 2018). Through processes of 'responsibilisation,' risk (of financial loss, of security, of environmental degradation) passes from the landowner to the

individuals who manage and consume this space, with no transfer of assets or residual asset value. Not only is access predicated on conditionalities, and outside of the control of the hydrocitizens themselves, but their actions in performing citizenship may well contribute to increasing the value of the water company's property portfolio. Thus public access to privately-owned spaces does not, certainly in the longer term, challenge current environmental injustices any more than is the case with any urban open space (Larson, 2017). While access may yield other benefits, such as the apparent emergence of new forms of active citizenship, these benefits are also largely temporary, while the citizenships themselves lack the very civil and political dimensions that were so fundamental to the original construct (see Marshall, 1950).

The rationale for opening up these sites as POPS – access for all, health, wellbeing, community, action, environmental stewardship- means that the question of a truly radical move – returning the water assets to the community from which they were derived - is rendered invisible. CSR and POPS do not engender real and lasting change, but instead offer an alternative form of hydrosocial power imbalance just as other forms of new urban space have been found to pave the way for the injustices associated with gentrification (Wolch et al., 2014) and exclusion (Gilchrist and Ravenscroft, 2013). Time may show that the communities and volunteers who will use the POPS may help to smooth out the conditionalities of access they will currently have to negotiate. Further, interaction with the waterscape and the POPS may organically raise the issue of asset ownership and stewardship within these communities over sites that were, for so long, occluded to them. For the moment, however, hydrocitizenship remains very much at the margins: being hybrid, diverse and conditional not only on performativity, but also on existing and enduring power relationships with the owners and managers of blue/green space.

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